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ONE OF THE STATIONS OF THE KISO KAIDO
BY HIROSHIGE

MORE JAPANESE PRINTS

THE Japanese artists who made color prints were not very numerous; the list of the well-known ones does not number more than fifty, and if those best known had not been tremendously prolific, the Japanese color print would be rare indeed. They, however, produced a great number of prints in large editions but comparatively few books with colored illustrations; most of the illustrated works were simply in black and white.

The prints appeared in single sheets or series, which were originally sold in simple paper covers. These collections were sometimes bound or sewn together, which makes them look like books, but in reality they are a kind of album and should be classed amongst the prints. To this kind belong the different series of landscapes by Hiroshige and his best-known work, the Tokaido, a series of views on the main road from Tokio to Kyoto. The traveler or pilgrim who had made this journey bought the Tokaido as a record of the beautiful spots he had seen on his journey, of the famous inns on the road, and the difficult crossings he had made; it is practically the same as the souvenirs of the Rhine which our fathers used to bring back

from their European voyages, strings of colored views that fitted in a coin-shaped box, only the Japanese kind, though intended for the common people, is artistic and beautiful.

Hiroshige made many series of views of the famous roads, interesting cities, picturesque lakes, etc. Some of these are well known and are represented in most of the important collections; the earlier series, however, are not so often seen. The Museum has acquired a collection of eighty Hiroshige landscape prints amongst which many are quite rare, and all of exceptionally good quality—they are, in fact, the best pieces chosen from a collection of unusually high standard.

The Museum has also acquired a number of Hiroshige flower and bird prints and a collection of Shunsho, Shunyei, and Shunko actor portraits. What the Hiroshige prints were as souvenirs of the road, the actor portraits were of the theatre. They represented the actors in their best moments in famous parts, and often in female rôles, as no women were allowed on the Japanese stage. These prints, bought as mementoes of the plays or actors, were not published in large collections but often in sets of from two to five, representing either the actors separately or a scene from the play.

Shunsho, who was born in 1726, broke entirely with the style of the so-called primitives or the Torii school; he only continued to make use of the size of the prints which had been customary for actor portraits and which are called Hosoyé by the Japanese. For the rest he started out on a new line entirely his own in which there is no trace of the primitives or their relation to the Chinese classic painters. He lacks their simple, great curves and

publisher. The series of four actors reproduced here is without background, and has the *tsubo* and the artist's signature very small in red on the robes of the figures.

Katsukawa Shunsho became the head of a school known as the Katsukawas because they all took the master's name, forming their surnames likewise after his. Shunyei and Shunko were the most interesting of these pupils; though their actor portraits are very like the master's, they



FOUR ACTOR PORTRAITS
BY SHUNSHO

noble simplicity, but he has, on the other hand, a great, direct frankness and a certain degree of realism. His portraits are real portraits, the famous actors are easily recognizable, they are daintily drawn, and the color schemes are charming. Though the composition of most of his actor portraits is of the simplest, just one standing figure on a page about $12 \times 5\frac{1}{2}$ inches, there is infinite variety in the arrangement; some of the earliest portraits have no background, then come the simple indications of landscape or interior probably suggested by the stage scenery, and finally some quite elaborate realistic backgrounds. Many of the early Shunshos have no signature except the *tsubo*, a small seal in the shape of a vase, the sign of Hayashi, his

have their own characteristics and qualities. Shunyei's color is more subdued and less charming, his drawing, on the other hand, is finer than Shunsho's; Shunko is perhaps more spirited and less conventional than his master.

Later on, the works of these masters will be shown in Room H11, where a collection of Japanese prints is always on view and is changed every few months. At present some of the newly acquired Hiroshige landscape and flower prints are shown there, and the most important Shunsho actor portraits are in the Room of Recent Accessions. Through these new acquisitions of particularly fine examples the Museum collection of Hiroshige, Shunsho, and his school has become exceptionally good. S. C. B. R.